

For Immediate Release

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Ounce of Prevention Fund awarded Gates Foundation post-secondary education grant

Chicago-based Ounce of Prevention Fund received a grant more than \$300,000 from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to study existing supports and barriers to post-secondary education among young, low-income parents in three cities nationwide. The Ounce will also design a pilot intervention program that uses early childhood education centers as a vehicle to support the parents' continuing education.

The grant is a part of the Gates Foundation's new initiative, announced Tuesday, to improve college enrollment and completion rates in America.

"The unique aspect of our project is that we're leveraging our relationships with high-quality early childhood centers to reach low-income parents," said Diana Rauner, executive director of the Ounce. "To date, there are few effective strategies for assisting this hard-to-reach population. Our research will inform the creation of an innovative approach that could offer new opportunities to these parents."

The study will include a diverse group of young parents, including African American parents in Chicago and Denver, and Hispanic parents in Denver and Miami. If successful, the pilot program could be expanded to benefit more parents in early childhood programs across the country.

"The education level of parents affects not only their social mobility and job prospects, but also the educational development of their children," Rauner said. "By supporting the educational needs of these parents, we can help eliminate the achievement gap and most effectively promote early learning in the youngest and most at-risk children."

The pilot program will be administered at Educare Centers, state-of-the-art schools that serve at-risk children from birth to five years, including a center in the Grand Boulevard neighborhood in Chicago. Past Gates Foundation grants have supported the replication of Educare Centers across the country, including two in Washington state. The foundation has also supported the First Five Years Fund, a project of the Ounce that seeks to increase national awareness of the importance of early childhood education.

To advance this project, the Ounce will partner with Dr. Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, the Virginia and Leonard Marx Professor of Child Development and Education at Teachers College and the College for Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University, and with Dr. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale, a professor of Human Development and Social Policy in the School of Education and Social Policy and a faculty fellow at the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University.

With grants totaling \$69 million announced earlier this week, the Gates Foundation initiative aims to double the number of low-income students who earn a postsecondary degree or credential with genuine value in the workplace by age 26—an increase of approximately 250,000 graduates each year.

“There is no greater door to opportunity in this country than access to a quality education,” said Allan Golston, president of the Gates Foundation’s U.S. Program. “Today, Americans without a college education live close to the poverty line for a family of four. That is why we are making a long-term commitment to dramatically increase college completion—a goal that is both ambitious and necessary.”

More information about the Gates Foundation initiative is available at <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/press-releases/Pages/low-income-postsecondary-degree-081209.aspx>. To speak with a Gates Foundation representative, call (206) 709-3400 or e-mail media@gatesfoundation.org.

The Ounce of Prevention Fund invests in the healthy development of at-risk infants, toddlers, preschoolers and their families. We use an innovative cycle of family-focused programs, research, training, policy analysis and advocacy to help young children succeed in school and throughout life.

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